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Sumiala, Johanna Maaria

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# “JE SUIS CHARLIE” AND THE DIGITAL MEDIASCAPE: THE POLITICS OF DEATH IN THE CHARLIE HEBDO MOURNING RITUALS

JOHANNA SUMIALA

University Lecturer, Docent

Department of Social Research/Media and Communication Studies

P.O. Box 54 FIN-00014

University of Helsinki

e-mail: johanna.sumiala@helsinki.fi

## ABSTRACT

This article\* examines rituals of mourning in the digital mediascape in the case of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in Paris, 2015. The idea of the digital mediascape draws on Arjun Appadurai's (1990) seminal work on mediascape and develops it further in the current framework of digital media. Rituals of mourning are approached as a response and a reaction to the anxiety and distress caused by the unexpected violent death of global media attention. The phenomenology of ritual practices in *Charlie Hebdo* is characterised as multi-layered, relational and coexisting. The article looks in particular at the ritual mourning in association with the message and the meme “Je suis Charlie”. The ‘imagined worlds’ created around the digital circulation of this ritual message are discussed in relation to the idea of the politics of death formed around such fundamental value-laden questions as whose life counts as life and is thus worthy of public recognition of mourning, as Judith Butler (2004) has asked.

KEYWORDS: digital mediascape • politics of death • mourning rituals • *Charlie Hebdo*

## CHARLIE HEBDO ATTACKS CAPTURE THE DIGITAL MEDIASCAPE

At 11:30 on the morning of January 7, 2015, a Wednesday, French-Algerian brothers Said and Cherif Kouachi attacked the headquarters of the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*. Twelve people were killed in the rampage. After the attack, the Kouachi broth-

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ers returned to their car and exchanged fire with police who were blocking their escape route. A few minutes later, they executed an injured police officer, Ahmed Merabet, at point-blank range. An ordinary media user, Jordi Mir, filmed the perpetrators' escape from the building, as well as the shooting of the police officer, and posted the video on Facebook. The video immediately went viral, and the attacks exploded into professional mainstream media and social media alike. Newsrooms all over the world followed the massive security operation as the Kouachi brothers managed to hijack another car and flee north out of Paris. In the evening, tens of thousands of people took to the streets around Europe to show their solidarity with those killed by the gunmen. Global public mourning took off on Twitter when a French journalist and artist, Joachim Roncin, first tweeted "Je suis Charlie", for *Stylist Magazine*. In the next days, this hashtag became the most re-tweeted message in the history of Twitter (Sumiala et al. 2016).

On the next day, January 8, the attackers continued their escape and thousands of security personnel were deployed to comb the area, approximately 90 kilometres away from Paris, where the two men were last seen. Meanwhile, in Paris, reports emerged that a policewoman had been shot and killed, but the link with the *Charlie Hebdo* attack was not immediately established. On Friday, January 9, police located the attackers in the area Dammartin-en-Goele. The brothers were chased to an industrial complex 35 kilometres from Paris where they seized a printing works and took a hostage. In east Paris, at around 12:30 p.m., a third gunman, Amedy Coulibaly, seized a Jewish supermarket, killed four people, and took hostages. It emerged that Coulibaly was responsible for the killing of the Paris policewoman the day before. In his phone call to the French TV station BFM-TV, Coulibaly stated that his attack was synchronised with the attacks of Kouachi brothers and that they belonged to the same group of terrorists. He also threatened to kill his hostages unless the Kouachi brothers were allowed to go free. After several hours, hostage-situation police special forces stormed the market and killed Coulibaly. The Kouachi brothers were also killed by special forces on the same day. The next peak in the event took place on January 11 when world leaders and people in France gathered in the streets to demonstrate the values of liberty and freedom of expression. These marches gained massive visibility on the digital platforms of professional and social media. The drama escalated upon the publication of a 'survival issue' of *Charlie Hebdo*; the cover featured an image of the Prophet Muhammad holding a slogan, "Je suis Charlie", with the title "Tout est pardonné" ('all is forgiven'). Its publication on January 14 became a media event in itself (Sumiala et al. 2016).

This article examines the ritual response to the unexpected violence of massive media interest in the digital mediascape. The idea of digital mediascape was first introduced by Arjun Appadurai (1990: 296) and relates to Appadurai's work on five dimensions in global cultural flows he calls ethnoscapas, technoscapas, mediascapas, finanscapas and ideoscapas. Of these scapes, mediascape is of special relevance here. In Appadurai's (1990: 298–299) understanding mediascape refers both to the distribution of technological capabilities that produce and disseminate information, which are today available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world, and to the images of the world created by these media. Appadurai (1990: 299) explains:

'Mediascapes', whether produced by private or state interests, tend to be image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, and what they offer to those

who experience and transform them is a series of elements (such as characters, plots and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places. These scripts can and do get disaggregated into complex sets of metaphors by which people live [...] as they help to constitute narratives of the 'other' and proto-narratives of possible lives, fantasies which could become prolegomena to the desire for acquisition and movement.

Appadurai's work on global flows based on his idea of the various, interconnected scapes has had a notable influence in anthropology because of its attempt to re-think the relationship between the local and the global in the contemporary world of global communication and movement of people (see for example Inda and Rosaldo 2008). His work has inspired scholars to look at the mobilities, flows and mediated imaginations created in multilayered local, national and global contexts (see for example Metcalf 2001). While considerably influential in theorising globalisation in anthropology, the main criticism against Appadurai's thinking has addressed the level of generality in his theorising. His work has been criticised for its lack of empirically based evidence and, hence, weakness to grasp the complex ways in which the global flows of social imaginations are always socially constructed, multiple and embedded in local meaning and social structures (see for example Tsing 2004; Derné 2008).

In this article I wish to apply empirically the idea of mediascape and develop it in the framework of digital media. I approach mediascape as a fluid, digital landscape that creates "imagined worlds" (Appadurai 1990: 299) through ritual practices. This digital mediascape is made of complex *mélange* of digital communication technologies, producers, messages and audiences. It is a mobile and a liquid scape, to use Zygmunt Bauman's (2000) terminology, in which circulation and dissemination of images has special importance. These images can be produced by professional media users such as editors, journalists and PR professionals, as well as ordinary media users. They may include online news images, as well as memes, Instagram photos, Facebook and YouTube images. The ritual narratives in this digital mediascape consist of forms and formats such as posts, tweets, comments and blogs. The audiences in the digital mediascape vary immensely. We may identify local, national as well as transnational and global audiences. In the digital mediascape viewers move from one category to another. They may participate in rituals in their local social media groups as well as in the platforms of the international news agencies. Furthermore, viewers can change their status with a click, and thus alter their status between a member of a ritual audience and a producer of ritual practices, and vice versa (cf. Sumiala 2013).

My analysis is based on empirical material collected in the research project *Je Suis Charlie – The Symbolic Battle and Struggle over Attention*. The project combined quantitative big data analysis with qualitative digital ethnography. The digital data consists of 5,159,097 tweets, of which 28.83% were original tweet posts and 71.17 % were 'engagements', which means here re-tweets and/or comments. The hashtags used to collect data were: "Je suis Charlie", "Je suis Ahmed", "Je ne suis pas Charlie", "#jesuis-charlie", "#jesuisahmed", "#jenesuispascharlie", and the languages included in selecting the data were French, English, and Arabic. The empirical material collected covers the period between January 7 and January 16, 2015, which marks the time frame between the beginning of the attacks at the *Charlie Hebdo* headquarters on the January

7 to two days after the publication of the new *Charlie Hebdo* issue (which took place on January 14). This survival memorial sold a print of 795 million copies (the regular circulation of *Charlie Hebdo* paper is about 60,000 copies).

The analysis of the empirical material consisted of three interconnected phases: 1) digital ethnography collected during the time of the event provided the first outline of the event; 2) automated content analysis and social network analytics carried out with the quantitative media data constructed the digital field for research (Boumans and Trilling 2016); 3) digital ethnography provided an in-depth interpretation of what (substance/content) was circulating and how this material connected with the 'where' in the digital landscape, hence constituting links and connections in the media landscape necessary for the social meaning making of the event (Sumiala et al. 2016: 8).

This article draws on the findings of phase three. The practices of fieldwork consist of participating in the digital mediascape and tracing how actors, audiences, texts, images and posts travel from one platform and context (starting from Twitter) to another; identifying those repetitive patterns of symbolic communication and detecting the social encounters created in these digital activities. By following and visiting different digital platforms and locations the ethnographer begins to observe connections made between the events (the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks) taking place in the world 'out there', and their digital lives in the digital mediascape. The digital media has a reference point beyond, but not totally independent from, itself. In this online–offline relationship, the ethnographer travels between the 'real' and the 'digital', between the centre(s) and peripheries of ritual action.

A note of digital ethnography is in order here. This shift in the scope of ethnography has consequences for the idea of fieldwork in ethnographic research. Aside from traditional ethnography, concepts such as "web ethnography," "netnography", and "virtual ethnography/anthropology" have emerged to describe fieldwork conducted on virtual environments (Boellstorff 2008; Postill and Pink 2012; Hine 2015; Kozinets 2015). These new approaches on ethnographic studies indicate the changes of media environment in which the boundaries between different operators, texts, and images are under constant flux. But as Tom Boellstorff (2008) points out, these virtual worlds are as legitimate as contexts of culture and meaning making as the 'real' worlds. It has also become more and more difficult to draw a line between the two, as the elements of virtual worlds blend with the elements of the 'real' worlds. In other words, the virtual worlds are not just reflections of 'reality' or completely separate or isolated from 'real' worlds. Instead, they should be perceived as sites of meaningful social action and cultural reconstruction that can be studied through ethnographic methods applied to the digital media environment. However, it is important to note that in this article 'virtual' does not refer to the world of Second Life or avatars (Boellstorff 2008). Instead, the virtuality in the digital mediascape is played out in a complex interchange between physical actions taking place in certain locations (such as Paris) and their digital mediations (images, texts). In addition, the digital mediascape offers a space for ritual practices performed solely in the digital context.

Ritual is one of the oldest and most resilient responses to death – itself an essential element in constructing death in society (see for example Metcalf and Huntington 1997). In the anthropological literature, death rituals are considered to take different forms and shapes depending on historical, cultural and social context, hence, there is no universally shared definition of death ritual, or any other ritual for that matter (cf. Grimes 2014). Instead of focusing on finding a general definition of ritual, Ronald Grimes (2014) and many other contemporary scholars of ritual, suggest an approach in which the emphasis is rather given to what a ritual does (see also Bell 1997).

One way to think about death ritual is to categorize it as a rite of passage or a life crisis ritual (see for example van Gennep 1960; Turner 1969; Bell 1997). The work of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner is particularly influential in this tradition of thought. Whereas van Gennep emphasises ritual as a process rather than a representation, Turner examines ritual as a transformative practice. As Bruce Kapferer (2004: 38) maintains, Turner (1969) understood the ritual process as something more than merely a machine for social reproduction or for maintaining the cultural categories of meaning. Instead, Turner concentrated on the process of ritual as the generative source for the invention of new cultural categories. Kapferer (2004: 38) explains:

The powerful argument that he [Turner] began was that processes observable in ritual action – especially those that are creative, generative, and innovative – are constantly repeated (regardless of whether or not they are recognized as being ritual) in the contexts of major moments of social and political change. Furthermore, they often dramatically appear at transformative moments.

When thinking about death ritual in this Turnerian framework, we may approach death ritual as a transformative cultural and social practice that has the potential to create new meanings in a chaos caused by the loss of life. In addition, death ritual can help individuals and society to overcome disorder triggered by death and, hence, create a new sense of continuation of life. What is more, death ritual can help the living to transform the deceased into a new category in social life, whether it is ancestors, spirits, angels or memories. In helping to reorganise those social relations between the living and the dead, death ritual can create new social life around death (see Metcalf and Huntington 1997; Davies 2002).

The idea of ritual as a transformative practice resonates with Kapferer's (2004) work on ritual, imagination and phantasmagoric space. Kapferer (2004: 47) explains:

A phantasmagoric space a dynamic that allows for all kinds of potentialities of human experience to take shape and form. It is, in effect, a self-contained imaginal space – at once a construction but a construction that enables participants to break free from the constraints or determinations of everyday life and even from the determinations of the constructed ritual virtual space itself. In this sense, the virtual of ritual may be described as a determinant form that is paradoxically anti-determinant, able to realize human constructive agency. The phantasmagoric space of ritual virtuality may be conceived not only as a space whose dynamic interrupts prior determining processes but also as a space in which participants can reimagine (and redirect or reorient themselves) into the everyday circumstances of life.



This is to say that in Kapferer's thinking the creative grounds of the phantasmagoric open to the imaginal, to the imaginaries through which worlds are made, but also to the imaginaries through which worlds are changed, together with the living (Handelman 2004b: 214). According to this way of thinking about death rituals, a scholarly focus is first given to the actual ritual work in the digital mediascape, and only after that to its meanings or functions in a given context. Don Handelman (2004b: 213) calls this perspective a phenomenological approach to the study of ritual. It gives special emphasis to the phenomenality of the phenomenon itself, and not to its surround, ritual in its own right, if you will (Handelman 2004a: 3–4).

In the digital mediascape the phenomenality of ritual cannot be thought of without the concept of the virtual. Kapferer (2004: 37) makes a distinction between his use of the concept of virtual in studying ritual and "the virtuality of cyber technology". However, I would like to suggest an approach in which the digital mediascape includes the potential for phantasmagoric space. It opens to the phenomenality of ritual and related imaginal dimension in digital ritualisation around death. In this line of arguing, the rituals of death are perceived as activities that are profoundly spatial and imaginal. Inspired by the work of previously mentioned Boellstorff (2008: 5), I wish to argue that not only do digital rituals borrow assumptions from 'real life' rituals, but digital rituals can also show us how our 'real life' rituals have been 'virtual' all along (cf. Grimes 2014).

#### MOURNING RITUALS IN THE *CHARLIE HEBDO* ATTACKS

In the rituals of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, elaborate practices of mourning and commemoration, as well as ritual contestation, were performed and circulated in different digital media at local, national and global levels (see also Sumiala et al. 2016). In this article I look in particular at the rituals of mourning carried out in connection with the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks. The quantitative media data gathered for the analysis suggests that the slogan and a meme "Je suis Charlie" became the most tweeted and shared message associated with the event. Figure 1 illustrates the differences in numbers if we compare the "Je suis Charlie" hashtag with the two other popular hashtags in the data, for example "Je ne suis pas Charlie" ('I am not Charlie') and "Je suis Ahmed" ('I am Ahmed', referring to the death of the police officer Ahmed Merabet).

In addition to Twitter, the international news media also contributed actively in popularizing the "Je suis Charlie" slogan and meme. The creator of the meme, Joachim Roncin, became an internationally recognised public figure and a topic for global news (see Potet 2015). The BBC interview (January 3, 2016) of Roncin demonstrates a desire to give meaning to the public mourning symbolised around his meme:

"I was deeply shocked, but I wasn't frightened." [...] The slogan took off because "we're trying to feel a community", he says. "It is very reassuring to be all together whenever there is something horrible happening." [...] for [...] Joachim Roncin, the meaning of his slogan is still straightforward. "Je suis Charlie" is just an expression of solidarity, of peace," he says. "And that's all." (Devichand 2016)

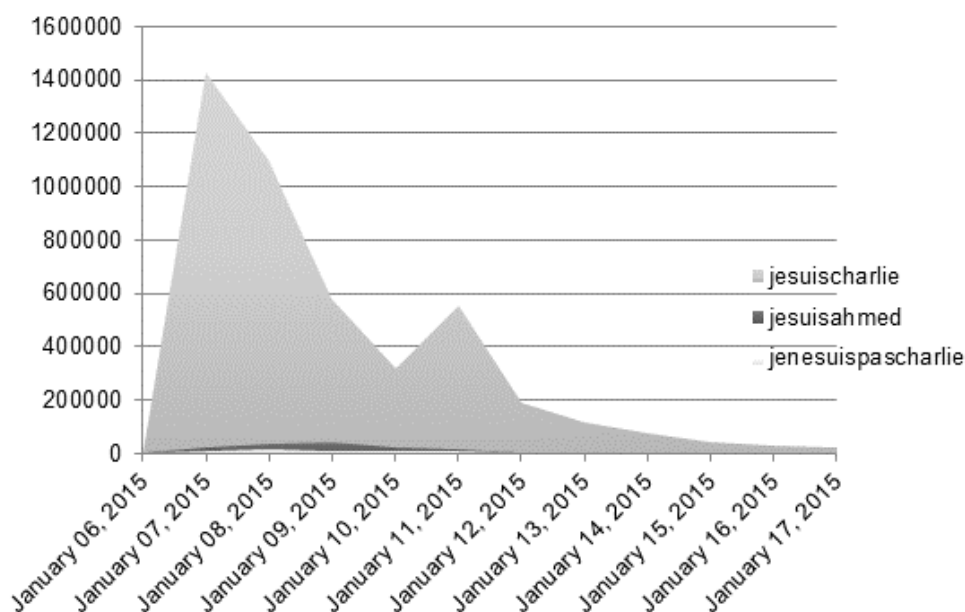


Figure 1. The popularity of hashtags associated with Charlie Hebdo attacks.

## DIGITAL MEDIASCAPE CONNECTS SITES OF RITUAL MOURNING

When we analyse the mourning rituals performed in the digital mediascape after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks we need to acknowledge a close interplay between the physical and the digital ritual practices of mourning. In mourning practices, Paris was constituted as the ritual centre of the events. The digital mediascape was filled with news and social media images of people gathering in silent demonstrations on the streets, squares, and plazas to mourn and to pay respect to the victims of the attacks. I consider taking and sharing these pictures in the digital mediascape a ritual practice demonstrating solidarity and compassion for the victims of the attacks. As Roncin put it “we’re trying to feel a community [...]. It is very reassuring to be all together whenever there is something horrible happening.” (Devichand 2016) Typical of the digital mediascape, these images were produced by professional and ordinary media users alike and followed a repetitive pattern of symbolic communication, crystallised around the message “Je suis Charlie”.



Figure 2. *Je Suis Charlie* drawing (H.KoPP 2015).



We may argue that those ritual practices of producing and sharing “Je suis Charlie” images in the digital mediascape contributed to the creation of a phantasmagoric space in which participants in the digital mediascape could reimagine, and redirect or reorient themselves (Kapferer 2004) in this shared imaginary of compassion and solidarity symbolised in a ritual message “Je suis Charlie” (‘I am with those who were killed’). The virtuality of this ritual practice of imagining solidarity brought media institutions (for example *CNN*, *The New York Times*, *BBC*, *Le Monde*) as well as ordinary, individual media actors together in the digital mediascape beyond the local (Paris) or national (French) contexts and frameworks, hence creating what Appadurai (1990) calls an ‘imagined world’ of mourning.

#### PILGRIMAGE IN THE DIGITAL MEDIASCAPE

Another aspect in mourning after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks was a ritual pilgrimage (see for example Coleman and Elsner 1998; Eade and Sallinow 1999). This describes physical and digital journeys to places of high symbolic value. In addition, in this ritual practice a complex dynamic between the physical and digital spatial encounters was performed. As a site of a spontaneous shrine, the street outside the headquarters of *Charlie Hebdo* turned into a sea of flowers and notes of condolence. Images of people wandering to this particular site of mourning and meeting there to pay their respects circulated in the digital mediascape. In addition, physical and digital pilgrimages were made to the Eiffel Tower. The lights of the tower were turned off on January 8. This ritual gesture was given massive attention and recognition in the digital mediascape as numerous images and their remakes circulated in the digital mediascape. *The Daily Mail* headline from January 8, 2015 put it: “Paris Goes Dark for *Charlie Hebdo*: Eiffel Tower’s Lights Are Turned off as Vigils are Held around Globe for 12 Victims Slaughtered by Fanatics” (Mullin and Boyle 2015).

Another place of high symbolic importance and, thus, a site of pilgrimage, was the Place de la République (the square of the republic), in which people gathered to pay their respects for the victims around the statue of Marianne, the personification of the French Republic, which is located at the centre of the square. An image in which people had gathered by the statue holding placards of Roncin’s meme became particularly well known.

At the national level, tributes were paid in several French cities, such as the Place des Terreaux in Lyon and in the centre of Marseille, as well as in numerous other locations of intensified symbolic relevance and meaning.



Photo 1. Place de la République, January 11, 2015 (Ortelpa 2015).



Photo 2. Ritual march in Marseille. Photo by Jean-Benoît Zimmermann (2015).

## THE DIGITAL MEDIASCAPE ENABLES TRANSNATIONAL MOURNING

The waves of public mourning and commemoration travelled well beyond the physical borders of France, as people in different parts of Europe and the world joined Paris and France in public mourning and commemoration. To give some examples of the ritual performances carried out in other cities and in the digital mediascape, in London people gathered together on several occasions to pay tribute to the victims of *Charlie Hebdo* and performed public rituals of solidarity by created circles of pens in Trafalgar Square.



Photo 3. Trafalgar Square. Photo by Aurelien Guichard (2015).

In Berlin people gathered at the Brandenburg Gate to pay their tribute and manifest solidarity carrying signs saying “Je suis Charlie”. In Moscow people gathered around the French Embassy and brought flowers, candles and notes of condolence to pay tribute to the victims. Spontaneous symbolic sites were created on the ground by the embassy, such as a heart made out of red roses. French embassies, as spatial representations of France in mourning, were given special emphasis in many other cities as well.

Yet another ritual performance of mourning and paying tribute to victims was carried out on January 11, 2015. The ritual march of public demonstration of around 40 world leaders including Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel, British Prime Minister David Cameron and French President François Hollande among others joined millions of people marching in the streets of Paris (called *marche républicaine*, in English ‘repub-



lican march') and elsewhere in France. This public spectacle, performed by the world leaders as well as by ordinary people, made massive headlines in the global news and caused substantial activity on the social networking sites. To give an example, *New York Times* wrote on January 11, 2015: "Huge Show of Solidarity in Paris Against Terrorism" (see Alderman and Bilefsky 2015), *Independent* on January, 11 2017 opened its story with a headline "Paris March: Global Leaders Join 'Unprecedented' Rally in Largest Demonstration in History of France" (see Lichfield 2015).

## PROFESSIONAL AND VERNACULAR PRACTICES OF MOURNING CIRCULATE SIDE BY SIDE

One type of ritual practice characteristic of social media was making a video of mourning and commemoration. Ordinary people of different nationalities made YouTube videos to pay tribute (*hommage* in French) and to commemorate the victims. Many of these videos provided rich symbolic visualisations of mourning, grief and commemoration and showed solidarity for the values of freedom of expression the cartoonists represented for the mourners. One of these videos, made by username Eloïse Derquenne (2015) is titled "Je suis Charlie Hebdo – Hommage/Tribute". The video was uploaded on January 8, 2015, only a day after the attacks took place. This video consists of elements of music, still and live images and phrases in which the solidarity for the victims is expressed and the values of liberty of expression are defended against violence. Another YouTube video by username striks Vindicta (2015) is titled "Vidéo de l'Hommage Mondiale à *Charlie Hebdo*". This video also consists of music and images of the different sites in the world at which people have gathered together to mourn the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks. The slogan "Je suis Charlie" is constantly repeated in the images.

On Facebook, people also posted notes expressing solidarity, many of them using the slogan "Je suis Charlie". Two Facebook sites called "Je suis Charlie" were established, in addition to which the *Charlie Hebdo* Facebook site published the slogan on its page. Moreover, different types of artistic intervention took place on various platforms and online sites. Professional and amateur artists contributed to the ritualisation of the events by drawing cartoons and making and remaking other visual and political commentaries, such as songs composed, recorded and posted on YouTube (see for example JB Bullet 2015).

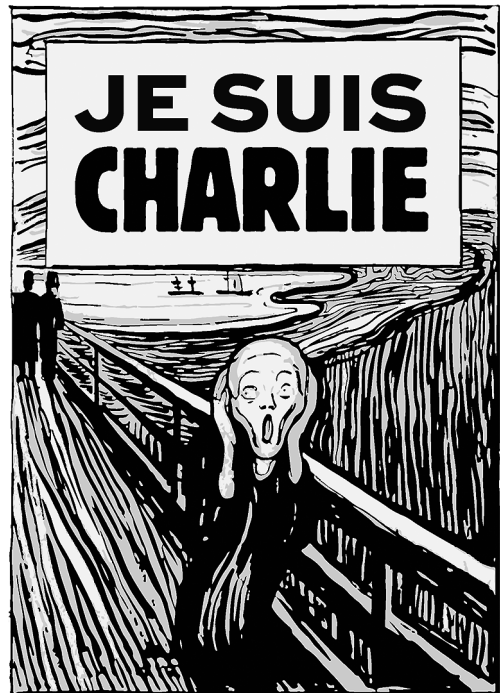


Figure 3. *The Scream*. Image by Paris 16 (2015).

The ritual practices of mourning and paying tribute to the victims were carried out in the digital mediascape by countless actors including professional news media as well as ordinary social media users on a variety of digital media platforms. In many cases those practices had an explicit connection with the mourning rituals held at the physical sites in Paris and elsewhere in the world. In other cases, the rituals of posting, sharing, making and remaking images and memes associated with the slogan “Je suis Charlie” were circulating prominently in the digital media and had more remote connection with the physical rituals carried out on the streets of Paris and the world. In many cases the dynamics are very difficult to categorise as the ritual practices referring to the actions outside and inside the digital media circulate simultaneously in the digital mediascape. The phenomenology of these ritual practices can, then, be described as multi-layered, relational and coexisting.

However, we should not overestimate this and claim any simple unanimous ritual reaction to the attacks. Counter voices were also articulated in the digital mediascape. One of the hashtags circulating in digital mediascape was “Je ne suis pas Charlie” (‘I am not Charlie’), voicing various criticisms against the attacks and the waves of solidarity in public mourning. Protests were also reported in different parts of the (Muslim) world, including countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen and Nigeria. Protests were also seen in London and other multicultural and multireligious world cities (see for example *Guardian* 2015). Slogans such as “Je suis Kouachi” (referring to the perpetrators, the Kouachi brothers), “Je suis musulman” (‘I am Muslim’), but also “Je suis musulman, pas terrorist” (‘I am Muslim, not terrorist’) were used as symbols of ritual resistance in the digital mediascape. Furthermore, in many YouTube videos reporting and representing protests, the message voiced was anger against *Charlie Hebdo* and its presumed islamophobia. The pictures of the Prophet Muhammad were considered insulting and deeply disrespectful of the sacred values of Muslims, hence offending Islam and its principles. While it would be misleading to categorise these ritualised performances as carnevalising the *Charlie Hebdo* deaths, they certainly voiced a counter-ritual performance against public mourning, grief and articulation of solidarity with the victims of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks (see Al Jazeera 2015).

#### THE POLITICS OF MOURNING IN THE DIGITAL MEDIASCAPE AND BEYOND

To follow Appadurai’s (1990: 299) idea of mediascapes, digital mediascapes are also best described as image-centred, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality that are formative for the ways in which ‘we’ imagine our lives. In the mourning over the *Charlie Hebdo* deaths the image and the narrative “Je suis Charlie” was transformed into a powerful ritual message that invited solidary and belonging in the digital mediascape well beyond any physical location or community. This message was performed simultaneously in multiple forms, and numerous physical and digital places and platforms by a vast number of actors. We may, thus, think about this digital space for mourning as a phantasmagoric space (Kapferer 2004). It enabled participants in the different parts of the world to come together in this digital mediascape, to break free from the constraints of everyday lives lived in different localities and to participate in the global digital ritu-

alisation around this death event. The digital mediascape, thus, offers a space in which the participants can imagine and reimagine as well as reorient themselves into the circumstance of life (and death!) in this global condition.

The ritual process of imagination and reimagination should never be taken as a neutral, let alone innocent, cultural phenomenon (Sumiala 2013). Rather, we should think about the consequences of these imaginations, in the frameworks beyond the given situation. The most prominent ritual activity in the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks was the massive sharing and circulation of the ritual message “Je suis Charlie”. Hence, the solidarities and belongings were performed most explicitly in association with the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoonists, and what they represented. *The Guardian* articulated on January 9, 2015 the ethos of this solidarity with explicit words: “We Are Charlie: ‘Freedom of Speech Needs to Be Strongly Defended’” (Carrier 2015). The other victims, such as Jewish customers at the Kosher supermarket, the police officers and other people murdered at the *Charlie Hebdo* office were given much less attention in the digital public mourning. (As an exception, one must acknowledge the attention given to Ahmed Merabet, a Muslim police officer, whose killing was recorded and went viral in the digital media.)

Other actors who also received less attention than the cartoonists were those who participated in the counter ritual marches and demonstrations against the solidarity wave for the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoonists. The category of victim (see for example Fassin and Rechtman 2009), those worthy of public compassion and solidarity, was excluded from those opposed to the public mourning who, perhaps, felt victimised by what they considered offensive actions by the *Charlie Hebdo* newspaper. According to *the Independent* from February 9, 2017, the demonstrators in London declared: “recent cartoons and drawings of the prophet published by the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and other publishers is a ‘stark reminder’ that freedom of speech is ‘regularly utilised to insult personalities that others consider sacred’” (Sabin 2015).

What we need to consider then, is the issue of the politics of mourning in the digital mediascape. Judith Butler (2004) reminds us of the constructed nature of the value of human life. Butler asks (ibid.: 20), “who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, what makes for a grievable life?” By ritually manifesting “Je suis Charlie” the mourners can be interpreted as identifying with the narrative of the digital mediascape “we are with those, who died because of what they represented.” By ritually declaring “Je suis Charlie” the lives of the cartoonists were made grievable over others who were also killed in the attacks, but were not associated with the values of liberty, equality and freedom (of speech) in a similar manner. The global volume of public mourning ritualised in the message “Je suis Charlie” intensified those imaginations between ‘us’ (the ones with Charlie) and ‘them’ (those who were not with Charlie). This digital coexistence of contradictory solidarities and belongings should not go unnoticed.

To conclude with, the ritual manifestation “Je suis Charlie” cannot be properly discussed without reflecting the value of freedom against the idea of blasphemy. The attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* newspaper headquarters was justified by the perpetrators by the blasphemous nature of the newspaper. *Charlie Hebdo* had violated the Muslim religion and its prohibition against drawing and visually insulting the Prophet Mohammed in many ways and on several occasions. Talal Asad (2009) argues that what is at stake in this kind of conflict is a discursive opposition between the secular West and religious



Islam. In the volume *Is Critique Secular?* Wendy Brown (2009: 14) argues that typically in this type of discursive opposition the West imagines itself as representing life and rationality, and those identified with religion (here in particular Islam) are imagined to represent death and aggression. The ritual mourning around “Je suis Charlie” also performs this opposition. The politics of death in the digital mediascape, thus, have the potential to create concurrently intensified global imaginations around ‘us’, and, consequently, the ‘other’ as the enemy. This heightened sense of ritualised imagination and related polarisation may bring about many unexpected consequences and effects when those globally ritualised imaginations become materialised in the local meaning and social structures of people’s everyday lives.

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